

HAPPINESS & HUNGER

by
Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

Contents

[Happiness & Hunger](#)
[Which Happiness Do You Want?](#)
[Endless Hunger](#)
[Where Does Hunger Stop?](#)
[The Best](#)
[The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil](#)
[Above & Beyond Good](#)
[Voidness](#)
[Natural Hunger & Unnecessary Hunger](#)
[Three kinds of Solitude](#)

Tan Ajarn gave this talk at a retreat back on 7 May 1986. It was transcribed, edited, & published in Keys to Natural Truth (recently reprinted). A new Thai magazine recently reprinted and sent it to me in a form easily transformed into html, so here it is. (Pali words are fudged to get around diacritical marks.)

Happiness & Hunger

Today I'd like to talk about something which most of you probably misunderstand. Although you've all come here with an interest in Buddhism. You may have some wrong understanding. For this reason, please gather your mental energies and set your mind to the task of listening. Pay special attention to what will be said today.

The thing we'll be talking about is happiness (*sukha*). This is a word that is quite ambiguous both in Thai, *kwamsukh*, in the Pali language, *sukha*, and even in English, happiness. In all three languages, this word has many varied meanings and applications. It's often difficult to understand exactly what people mean when they say the word 'happiness'. Because this subject can get very mixed up, it is necessary to reach some understanding of this thing, which is why we'll be speaking about happiness today.

The happiness felt in the everyday lives of ordinary people is one meaning of happiness. Then, there is the other kind of happiness, the happiness that arises with the realization of the final goal of life. There are these two very different things, but we call both of them "happiness". Generally, we mix up these two meanings, confuse them, and never quite understand what we're talking about.

Which Happiness do you want?

Here's one example of how the ambiguity of this word can cause problems. It's likely that you came here to study and practice Dhamma in search of happiness. Your understanding of happiness, the happiness you desire, however, may not be the same happiness that is the genuine goal of Buddhism and the practice of Dhamma. If the *sukha* (happiness) that you desire is not the *sukha* that arises from Dhamma practice, then we're afraid that you'll be disappointed or even heartbroken here. It's necessary to develop some understanding of this matter.

In order to save time and make it easy for you to understand, let's set down a simple principle for understanding of happiness. The usual happiness that common people are interested in is when a particular hunger or want is satisfied. This is the typical understanding of happiness. In the Dhamma sense, however, happiness is when there is no hunger or want at all, when we're completely free of all hunger, desire, and want. Help to sort this out right at this point by paying careful attention to the following distinction: happiness because hunger is satisfied and happiness due to no hunger at all. Can you see the difference? Can you feel the distinction between the happiness of hunger and the happiness of no hunger?

Let's take the opportunity now to understand the words '*lokiya*' and '*lokuttara*', as they are relevant to the matter we're investigating today. *Lokiya* means 'proceeding according to worldly matters and concerns'. *Lokiya* is to be in the world, caught within the world, under the power and influence of the world. Common translations are 'worldly' and 'mundane'. *Lokuttara* means 'to be above the world'. It is beyond the power and influence of the world. It can be translated 'transcendent' or 'supramundane'. Now we can more easily compare the two kinds of happiness: *lokiya-sukha* (worldly happiness) which is trapped under the power of, governed by the conditions and limitations of, what we call 'the world', and *lokuttara sukha* (transcendent happiness), which is beyond all influence of the world. See this distinction and understand the meaning of these two words as clearly as possible.

We must look at these more closely. *Lokiya* means 'stuck in the world, dragged along by the world', so that worldly power and influence dominate. In this state there is no spiritual freedom; it's the absence of spiritual independence. *Lokuttara* means 'unstuck, released from the world'. It is spiritual freedom. Thus, there are two kinds of happiness; happiness that is not free and happiness that is independent, the happiness of slavery and the happiness of freedom.

This is the point that we're afraid you'll misunderstand. It you've come here looking for *lokiya-sukha*, but you study Buddhism which offers the opposite kind of happiness, you're going to be disappointed. You won't find what you desire. The practice of Dhamma, including a wise meditation practice, leads to *lokuttara-sukha* and not to worldly happiness. We must make this point clear from the very beginning. If you understand the difference between these two kinds of *sukha*, however, you'll understand the purpose of Suan Mokkh and won't be disappointed here.

By now you ought to understand the difference between the two kinds of happiness; the happiness that comes from getting what we hunger for and the happiness of the total absence of hunger. How different are they? Investigate the matter and you will see these things for yourself. The happiness of 'hunger satisfied' and the happiness of 'no hunger': we can not define them more succinctly or clearly than this.

Endless Hunger

Now we'll observe further that the happiness based in the satisfaction of hunger is hopeless and can never be realized, because its hunger can never really be satisfied.

hopeless and can never be realized, because its hunger can never really be satisfied. The many things which arouse hunger are always changing. Whatever satisfies hunger changes, making that satisfaction fleeting and illusory, and so hunger returns. Hunger itself changes and, hence, can never be satisfied. This situation is eternal. The world today is stuck in this happiness which comes with fulfilling desires. The modern world is trapped in this endless problem.

Imagine, if you can, that you are the sole owner of the world, of the universe, of the entire cosmos. Now that you're the owner of everything, does hunger stop? Can it stop? Would you please examine this carefully with and in your own mind. If you were to get everything that you could possibly desire, to the point that you owned the whole world, would your hunger cease? Or would you hunger for a second universe? Would you want a third?

Consider the fact that hunger never ends by our attempts to satisfy it. In spite of this, the world today continues to develop the kind of education and evolution that seek merely to produce things which are more lovely and satisfying. Modern technology and science are slaves of hunger. Our world is falling into this deep hole of endlessly producing increasingly seductive things to try to satisfy hunger. But where are you going to find happiness in such a world?

I'd like to make some comparisons to illustrate how the worldly happiness of common sentient beings advances from phase to successive phase. The new-born infant is happy when it is cuddled in its mother's arms and sucks milk from her breast. This satisfies the infant until it grows a little older, a little bigger. Then the mother's arms and breast aren't enough. It learns about other foods and delights. Now its happiness depends on ice cream, candy, and junk food, on playing little games and running around the house. Then it grows older and those games don't satisfy the child any more. It wants to play football or play with dolls. These two are outgrown eventually and the teenager's interests and happiness revolve around sex. The previous kinds of satisfaction are of no more interest. When they become young men and women, don't expect them to be satisfied with the old types of happiness. Now, all they think about is sex and dates. Finally, the human being marries, becomes a wife or husband, and has hopes and wishes tied up in a house, money, and possessions. There's no way they can be satisfied with childish happiness (unless they haven't really grown up) The human being changes from stage to stage, and happiness also changes from stage to stage. It is continuous and endless. Hunger develops from stage to stage until death. After that, many believe, there is rebirth as a deva (celestial being, like angels): and still there's hunger, heavenly hunger for the happiness of devas. It never stops. Even in heaven with the gods or in the kingdom of God, should such things exist, hunger doesn't stop. In Buddhism these all are considered to be examples of worldly happiness that only deceives and confuses.

Where Does Hunger Stop?

I'd like to ask if in the Kingdom of God, or in whatever place God is, whether according to the scriptures of Christianity or any other religion, when we're with God can hunger and desire stop? If the Kingdom of God is the end of hunger and craving, then it's the same thing as Buddhism teaches: *nibbana*, or the happiness that is beyond the world because hunger has ended. But if we understand the Kingdom of God differently, if it is a place where we still hunger, then Buddhism isn't interested. Endless desire for better and better things to take as one's own is not the goal of Buddhism. Buddhism takes the fork in the road that leads beyond the world.

As for this thing we call 'the world', in the Buddhist description it is divided into many levels, realms, or wanderings. There's the common human world, with which we're most familiar, and its human types of *sukha*. Above this are the various heavenly realms where the *devas* supposedly live. First, there are the sensual wanderings, the *kamavacara*, of those who have sexual desires. These are supposed to be 'good', at least better than the human realm. Next, there are the Brahma wanderings, of which there are two categories: those dependent on form (matter) and those independent of form. These are better than the normal realms of existence, but they aren't the end of hunger. There is no more sensual hunger in the *rupavacara*, the fine-material

wanderings, but the 'beings' there still hunger after material existence. The 'beings' of the *arupavacara*, the non-material wanderings, are hungry as well. They hunger for non-material things rather than material. On each of these worldly levels hunger persists. The wants of the self don't stop. There are always things which the self wants. These highly refined states of happiness utterly fail to transcend the world. Even the highest Brahma realm is caught within the world, trapped below the power and influence of desire.

How are we going to finish hunger? We must turn around and destroy it. We don't need hunger. We must take this other path where there is no hunger. The essence of this path is the absence of the feeling of self, of "I" and "mine". This point is very profound. How much knowledge must we have, how much must we see, in order to stop this illusion of self?

It is necessary to realize this connection between the end of hunger and the cessation of the self illusion. In worldly situations there is always a self or "I" who hungers and strives to satisfy that hunger. Even if this self is on the highest heavenly level where hunger is only for the most refined things, nonetheless, there's a hungry self trying to get. Hunger persists as this self seeks to acquire things for itself without ever truly succeeding. By examining the many levels of getting and of happiness, we see that hunger is hopeless. Why? Because "self" is hopeless.

The Best

When you arrive at this stage, you ought to be familiar with what we call "the good" or "the best". You all have idea about "the best" and think that you deserve to get and have "the best". Your hunger only goes as far as "the best..!!" Whatever you identify as "the best" - whether a day on the beach or five minutes of rest from the turmoil in your head - is where your hunger grasps. Even while basking in God's radiance, the hunger for the best doesn't stop. We desire one kind of 'the best', but as soon as we get it our hunger reaches after a better 'the best'. This has no end as long as there's self that wants 'the best'. "The best" has no end point; we can't take it as our final goal. We continuously talk about "the best" or about the *summum bonum*, but our meanings are so very different: the best of children, of teenagers, of adults, of old folks; the best of the world and of religion. Yet each of these visions of "The best" make us "the hungriest" - hungry in refined, profound, subtle ways. We can never stop and rest in any "the best", for they are all *lokiya-sukha*.

"The best" cannot stand alone. It doesn't go anywhere without its mate "the worst". Through our grasping at "the best" we're burdened also with "the worst". Thus, our fixation on "the best" is merely self-perpetuating hunger. There's only one way out. If we keep searching for *sukha* in the world, we'll never find it. We must turn in the other direction, toward *lokuttara-sukha*. Hunger, must end, even hunger for 'the best'. Evil is one kind of busy trouble. Good is just another kind of trouble. To be free of all *dukkha*, the mind must be beyond good and evil, above best and worst-that is , it must dwell in voidness. This is the opposite of worldly happiness. It's the *lokuttara-sukha* of freedom from the self that hungers. There's no other way out of *dukkha* than from evil to good and then from good to voidness. In voidness hunger stops and there is true happiness.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

Those of you who are Christians or who have read the Bible will be familiar with the story of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that appears at the beginning of Genesis. It tells how God forbade Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He warned them that they would die if they did not obey. If you understand the meaning of this passage, you will understand the core of Buddhism. When there is no knowledge of good and evil, we can't attach to them, we're void and free of *dukkha*. Once we know about good and evil, we attach to them and must suffer *dukkha*. The fruit of that tree is this attachment to good and evil. This causes *dukkha* and *dukkha* is death, spiritual death.

Adam's children, down through the ages to us, carry this burden of knowing good and

evil, the burden of the self that attaches to good and evil and suffers spiritual death. We identify things as good and attach to them. We identify things as bad and detach from them. We are trapped in worldly conditions by our dualistic obsession with good and bad. This is the death of which God warned. Will you heed his warning?

Now what are we who have inherited this problem going to do about it? To continue running after the satisfaction of our hunger for "the best" is simply to perpetuate this cycle of birth and death. Thus, Buddhism isn't interested in any of the realm of *lokiya-sukha*, of good, better, and best. The Buddhist solution is to be above good and evil to be void.

Please understand that "the best" is not the highest thing. If you talk about God as the supreme good, "Buddhists won't be able to accept your words. To say that God, the highest thing in the universe, is the collection of everything good or the perfection of good is to limit God. The Supreme Thing, within dualistic conditions. Buddhists cannot accept this. The God of the Bible himself said that if we know good and evil we must die.

If you say, however, that God -if we choose to use this word - is beyond good and evil, then Buddhists can agree. In Buddhism, the goal is to transcend both good and evil, and realize voidness - to be void of "I", "me", "mine", and "myself". If we don't know good and evil, we can't attach to them and there is no *dukkha*. Or, if we know good and evil but still don't attach to them, then there is no *dukkha* just the same. Thus, the highest point for humanity is beyond good.

Above & Beyond Good

Beyond good there is nothing to hunger for and no one to hunger. Hunger stops. The "I" who hungers and all its desires disappear in voidness - the emptiness of self and soul. This voidness is the purpose of the practice of Dhamma. It is the way to transcend the endless cycles of hunger and worldly happiness. It is the Supreme Thing, the final of Buddhism.

The thing to observe in this matter is that it is impossible to attach to good and evil when there's no knowledge of good and evil. When there's no attachment, there's no *dukkha* and no problem. Once the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has been eaten, however, there is this knowledge of good and evil. What happens then? If we lack the wisdom (*pañña*) to know that we shouldn't attach to good and evil, we'll go and attach to the good and evil of common sentient beings. Thus, there is *dukkha*, which brings with it all the problem of life. These are the results of eating that fruit: attachment, *dukkha*, and death.

Once there is this knowledge, there is no going back to a state of innocence in which good and evil aren't known. After this knowledge arises, after the fruit has been eaten, we must go on to know fully that good and evil cannot be attached to. It is our duty and responsibility to learn this. Don't attach to good and evil because they are impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anatta*). Good and evil are *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anatta*. When there's this correct knowledge of good and evil, there's no attachment. Then there's no death, just as with Adam and Eve before they ate fruit. We've all eaten that fruit; we all know about good and evil. There's no going back to a state of innocence for us. Instead, we have the duty to know that good and evil should not be attached to. They must not be attached to. Please understand this matter wisely.

Don't attach to good and evil. Know them so thoroughly that you will never attach to them. This is the heart of Buddhism and essence of Christianity. Both religions teach this same thing, although people may interpret it in quite different ways. If you understand this, you will have the key to the genuine happiness of freedom from hunger.

[Home](#) | [Links](#) | [Contact](#)

[Copy Right Issues](#) © DhammaTalks.net

You can see that if we grasp and cling to "good", we are hungry for good. If we have something better, we hunger for what is better. If we have what is the best, we hunger for the best. No matter how "best" something is, it still causes hunger. We hunger for the best. Inevitably, this hunger is the problem that leads to *dukkha*. No matter what the degree of hunger, it will still cause some part of *dukkha*. Greedy hunger afflicts us in

the degree of hunger, it will still cause some sort of *dukkha*. Coarse hunger afflicts us in a crude way, while even the most subtle hunger—so refined that it can't be seen or understood—harms us in a way too subtle to be seen. If there is hunger, there will be *dukkha*. Life will be troubled and disturbed, making perfect peace and perfect happiness impossible.

Voidness

This is why Buddhism teaches voidness (*suññata*) -- the voidness of "I" and "mine" that transcends the best. If we have knowledge of beyond the best, of the voidness that is neither good nor evil, there's no problem. In *suññata* there's no hunger. Even the most subtle levels of hunger disappear. Therein *dukkha* is quenched and true spiritual peace remains. This is the final goal. As long as there is the slightest hunger, it prevents the final goal. As soon as all hunger has been extinguished, and with it all problems and all *dukkha*, genuine emancipation is evident. Emancipation in Buddhism is this freedom from hunger that comes with the realization of *suññata* (voidness). Please study this matter until your life is totally free of hunger.

Natural Hunger & Unnecessary Hunger

Let's go back and take another look at this thing we call "hunger". We ought to know that there are two levels of hunger. First, there is physical, material hunger, which is a natural process of life. The body instinctually feels hunger regarding its natural needs: clothing, food, shelter, medicine, exercise. This kind of hunger is no problem. It doesn't cause *dukkha* and can be satisfied without causing *dukkha*. Then, there is the second kind of hunger, which is mental, that we call "spiritual hunger". This is the hunger of thinking born out of attachment. Physical hunger really has no meaning, for it causes no problems. Even animals experience physical hunger, so they eat as allowed by the limits of the situation. Spiritual hunger, however, being tied up with ignorance (*avijja*) and attachment (*upadana*), destroys the coolness and calm of the mind, which is true happiness and peace, thus bringing *dukkha*.

The problem of human beings is that our minds have developed beyond the animal mind. The consciousness of animals has not learned how to turn physical hunger into mental hunger. They don't attach to their instinctual hunger as we do, so they are free of the *dukkha* caused by craving (*tanha*) and clinging (*upadana*). The human mind is more highly evolved and suffers from more highly evolved hunger. Through attachment the human mind knows spiritual hunger.

We must distinguish between these two kinds of hunger. Physical hunger can be dealt with easily. One day of work can satisfy our bodily needs for many days. With mindfulness and wisdom, physical hunger is no problem. Don't foolishly make it into *dukkha*. When it arises, just see it as *tathata* -- thusness, the state of being "just like that". The body has a nervous system. When it lacks something that it needs there arises a certain activity which we call "hunger". That's all there is to it -- *tathata*. Don't let it cook up into spiritual hunger by attaching to it as "my hunger" or the "I who hunger". That is very dangerous, for it causes a lot of *dukkha*. When the body is hungry, eat mindfully and wisely. Then physical hunger won't disturb the mind.

Hunger is solely a mental problem. The highly developed human mind develops hunger into the spiritual hunger that results in attachment. These are mental phenomena -- *tanha* (craving) and *upadana* (grasping and clinging, attachment) -- which aren't at all cool. Although we may be millionaires, with homes full of consumer products and pockets full of money, we still hunger spiritually. The more we consume, the more we hunger. However much we try to satisfy mental hunger, to that extent it will expand, grow, and disturb the mind ever more. Even billionaires are spiritually hungry.

So how are we to solve this problem? There is the Dhamma principle that stopping this foolish hunger results in peace of mind, cool happiness, freedom from disturbance.

Physical hunger doesn't bother us. It's easy to take care of, to find something to eat that satisfies the hunger. Spiritual hunger, however, is another matter. The more we eat, the more we hunger. This is the problem we're caught in- being annoyed, pestered,

...and the more the hunger, the more the problem, the more danger in being angry, sad, restless, bothered, agitated by spiritual hunger. When nothing annoys the mind, that is true happiness. This may sound funny to you, but the absence of disturbance is genuine happiness.

We're sure that each of you is bothered by hopes and wishes. You've come here with your hopes and expectations. These hopes, wishes, and expectations are another kind of spiritual hunger, so be very careful about them. Don't let them become dangerous! Find a way to stop the expecting and hoping. Live by *satipañña* (mindfulness and wisdom); don't live by expectations.

Usually we teach children to be full of wishes -- to "make a wish", to "dream the impossible dream." This isn't correct. Why teach them to live in spiritual hunger? It torments them, even to the point of causing physical pain, illness, and death. It would be kinder to teach them to live without hunger, especially without spiritual hunger. Live with *sati-pañña*, do whatever must be done, but don't hope, don't dream, don't expect. Hopes are merely spiritual hunger. Teach them not to attach. No hunger, neither physically nor mentally-think about it - what happiness that would be! There's no happiness greater than this. Can you see?

Three kinds of Solitude

Lastly, we'll talk about the benefits of the end of hunger. To do so, we'll ask you to learn one more Pali word. Listen carefully and remember it, for it is a most important word; *viveka*, in Pali; *vivek*, in Thai. *Viveka* can be translated "utmost aloneness, perfect singleness, complete solitude". Because people no longer understand this correctly, you've probably never heard of it. First, know that *viveka* has three levels. Physical *viveka* (*kaya-viveka*) is when nothing disturbs the physical level of life. Mental *viveka* (*citta-viveka*) is when no emotions disturb the mind, when the citta isn't troubled by things like sexual lust, hatred, fear, frustration, envy, sentimentality, and love. This mental *viveka* can occur even in a crowded noisy room; it isn't dependent on physical solitude. The third kind, spiritual *viveka* (*upadhi-viveka*) is when no feelings or thoughts of attachment to "I" and "mine", "soul" or "myself" disturb the mind. If all three levels happen, you are truly alone and free.

Merely being free of physical disturbances while emotions pester one isn't *viveka*. Many "meditators" run off into forests and caves to find solitude, but if they bring their emotions with them, they won't find what they're looking for. True happiness will elude them. If the emotions don't annoy them, but feelings of "I" and "mine" disturb and distract them, it can't be called "*viveka*", either. There must be no feeling of "I" or "mine" interfering. Then, there will be no hunger of any kind disturbing and no hopes pestering. This is solitude. The mind is perfectly alone. This is the happiness that is the aim of Buddhism. It is *vimutti* (emancipation) on Buddhism's highest level. The final goal of Buddhism, the highest liberation, isn't a mind that is merely happy or quiet. The ultimate goal is total freedom from all attachment, from any clinging to "I" or "mine". We want you to know about these three level of *viveka*.

If you are able to practice mindfulness with breathing completely and correctly through all sixteen of its steps and stages, then you will discover these three kinds of *viveka*. Then you will receive the happiness of never being tormented by hunger again. But if you don't like this kind of happiness, if you prefer the happiness of responding to hunger, of feeding desire, then nothing can help you a bit. It can't help you because Buddhism aims to eliminate the kind of happiness and enjoyment that depends on things to satisfy its hunger. We want that to end. We need the kind of *viveka* that is undisturbed by hunger.

This is what we are afraid you may misunderstand. If you don't understand the Buddhist kind of happiness, you might expect something that Buddhism can't provide. Then you will be disappointed. You will be wasting your time here. If you want the happiness that comes from responding to hunger, we have nothing to talk about. There's nothing for us to say. But if you want the happiness born from not having any

hunger at all, we have something to talk about. And we've said it already.

We hope that you will meet with success in your practice and development of mindfulness with breathing. Once you have, you will receive the genuine happiness born of the total absence of hunger.

Thank you for coming to Suan Mokkh and using it beneficially.

Translated by Santikaro Bhikkhu

Source : <http://www.suanmokkh.org>